



# take action!

## IT'S YOUR FEDERAL GOVERNMENT



### A CITIZEN'S GUIDE TO FINDING YOUR WAY AROUND CONGRESS

**I**T'S CERTAINLY TRUE THAT THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT LOOKS INTIMIDATING FROM THE OUTSIDE. So many Congressional staff, such imposing buildings, so many rules about committees, legislation, procedures.

But it's also true that all this belongs to you. *Yes, you.* You elect the representatives sitting there, you pay for the buildings, you help set the priorities for what happens.

So you need to take the plunge and take action. Stand up, speak out, and convey how you feel about our state of the union.

*The Citizen's Guide* offers some practical, time-tested suggestions. WAND staff have been working on the Hill for a long time now, and they know the ins and outs. They've seen what works, and how to make a difference. They offer these tips in the hopes that you will use them.

**Please take action!** And let us know what else you need to help you along the way. Good luck!



Tanya Wallace, WAND national field director

### Do you have something to say to your Members of Congress?

**It matters. No matter what it is.** We hope you will take the time to express your values and your priorities to Congress.

- **You can visit your Representative and Senators** — when they're in Washington, DC or when they're home. *A personal visit is the most effective thing you can do.*
- **You can send a message.** Whatever form you choose, *take care to personalize your communication.* Offices receive many, many pieces; the ones that stand out and have impact are the personal notes.
  - **You can send a letter;** it's best to send it to local offices in your home state; mail to Capitol Hill offices is delayed for security reasons. Make sure to personalize.
  - **You can send a fax.** Again, make sure to personalize.
  - **You can send an email;** this is one of the simplest and quickest ways to go. Many organizations have set up web sites to facilitate this action. (Check out the WAND Take Action! Center: [www.wandactioncenter.org](http://www.wandactioncenter.org).) And we'll say it again — *make sure to personalize.*

*First things first:  
Your Members of Congress*

**It's your Congress.**  
You have one Representative  
and two Senators.

**Do you know who they are?**

**Start here:**

[www.wandactioncenter.org](http://www.wandactioncenter.org)  
or call: 404-524-5999

### GET CONNECTED!

Check out these great online resources.

WAND Education Fund web site:  
[www.WANDEducationFund.org](http://www.WANDEducationFund.org)

Will web site:  
[www.willwand.org](http://www.willwand.org)

STAND web site:  
[www.standwand.org](http://www.standwand.org)



Women's Action for New Directions  
Education Fund • 2006



**Women's Action for New Directions  
Education Fund**

*WAND Education Fund educates the public and opinion leaders about the need to reduce violence and militarism in society, and redirect excessive military spending to unmet human and environmental needs.*

**Susan Shaer, Executive Director**

[www.WANDEducationFund.org](http://www.WANDEducationFund.org)  
[info@wand.org](mailto:info@wand.org)

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**Washington Office**

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Washington, DC 20002  
202-544-5055

**Field Office**

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Marianne's Fund  
Colombe Foundation

Marianne's Fund was established after the untimely death of Marianne Bond Webster in 1998, during her campaign for the Georgia State House. Marianne was a tireless crusader; active in Atlanta WAND, she was constantly working for the values closest to her heart: to encourage women to run for public office, to stem violence against women, to promote peace, to redirect military spending to family issues of health and education — especially regarding the legacy of nuclear waste.

Each year, money from the fund is disbursed to help realize projects that further these goals.

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**IT'S YOUR WORLD. IT'S YOUR GOVERNMENT.**

**HOW TO SET UP MEETINGS WITH YOUR MEMBERS OF CONGRESS**

If you're planning a trip to Washington, DC, you can try to set up meetings with your Members of Congress. However, this isn't your only chance to meet them face-to-face; they do spend a substantial amount of time at home, and they do spend some of that time in meetings — both public and private.



Del. Salima Siler Marriott (MD)

When your Members of Congress are at home, you have two ways to get face time. You can make an appointment for an office visit, or attend a local town hall meeting.

**Begin by checking the Congressional Recess Schedule for the year:**

[www.senate.gov](http://www.senate.gov) or [www.house.gov](http://www.house.gov)

You can also call the WAND national field office for information: 404-524-5999.

**SOME NOTES ABOUT THE PROCESS OF MAKING LEGISLATION**

- Anyone may draft a bill; however, only Members of Congress can introduce (and sponsor) legislation.
- *H.* signifies a House bill; *S.* signifies a Senate bill.
- The official legislative process begins when a bill or resolution is numbered, referred to a committee and printed by the Government Printing Office.
- The process then involves a series of steps, including subcommittee review, committee action, and so on.

For more information, refer to this site:

[www.wandactioncenter.org/issues/basics/?style=legis](http://www.wandactioncenter.org/issues/basics/?style=legis)

*Do you know how to reach your Members of Congress?*



**To begin**, you need to know who your Representative and Senators are, and how to reach them.

**IF YOU HAVE ACCESS TO THE WEB:**

The WAND web site has a lively Take Action! Center: [www.wandactioncenter.org](http://www.wandactioncenter.org). The Center keeps track of important legislation and guides you in sending a message to Congress. You just enter your zip code; it determines your Members of Congress and enters their email addresses automatically.

**IF YOU DON'T HAVE ACCESS TO THE WEB:**

If you're unsure of your legislators' names or contact information, please call the WAND field office: **404-524-5999**; or contact your local election office; or refer to the phone book.

AT THE SEAT OF POWER OR AT HOME...

HOW TO GET TIME WITH YOUR MEMBERS OF CONGRESS

Office meetings

Send your request letter for the meeting (by fax, email, or mail) to your Members of Congress as far in advance as possible. Then follow up by phone a few days later.

When you call, ask for the person who schedules time for the Member of Congress when s/he is at home. Fifteen minutes is a standard amount of time for a meeting. (If you meet with staff, it could be longer.) Offer to provide your letter again if necessary. (The scheduler may want to know a cell phone number in the event of last-minute changes.)

Suggested format for letter requesting meeting with Member of Congress

The Honorable \_\_\_\_\_

Dear Senator/Representative \_\_\_\_\_:

**GREETING:** (When possible, thank the Member of Congress for a recent good deed.)

**ASK:** I am writing to request a meeting on (Day, Month) to discuss (the issue).

**STATE WHO YOU ARE:** I live in (the district or state) and am a member of (your organization).

I will contact you in a few days about this meeting. Thank you for your kind consideration of this request.

Sincerely,

(Constituent • Address • Phone • Email)

TIPS ON CONDUCTING A SUCCESSFUL MEETING

- 1. Assemble citizen groups to meet with your Senators or Representative regarding your issue.** If the meeting is in the local office, be sure to follow up with the Legislative Assistant in Washington, DC who is responsible for your issue.
- 2. Invite others who support your cause to join you.**
- 3. Have a plan.** Be prepared. Determine who will lead the discussion, who will ask questions, who will take notes.
- 4. Be gracious.** When you begin the meeting, take a moment to extend thanks for something the Member of Congress has done — no matter how small. And remember to send a handwritten thank-you note after the meeting. (Since snail mail is delayed for security reasons, send it to the local office.)
- 5. Be effective.** To indicate the reach of your coalition, mention the number of constituents you represent. And have a specific request in mind: keep track of relevant Congressional legislation. Provide information about your request: hand out a brief summary.

**6. Report back.** What you learn in these meetings is important for future efforts. Be sure to send the information to the WAND office in Washington, DC (see the box on page 2; email lobby@wand.org).

After the meeting, please report this information

Meeting with Member of Congress **or** Staff **or** both (please circle one)

Member's name: \_\_\_\_\_ Staff name and title: \_\_\_\_\_

Your name, address, telephone number, and email: \_\_\_\_\_

Other advocates attending meeting: \_\_\_\_\_

What topic(s) did you bring up? \_\_\_\_\_

What was the response? \_\_\_\_\_

Town Hall meetings

Attending events where Members of Congress are speaking offers the opportunity: to thank them in public, call them to action on an issue, or ask them to take a leadership role.

Also, the media are often at these events. Media coverage may help influence your Member of Congress and educate the community.

TIPS ON ATTENDING A TOWN HALL MEETING

- 1. Do your homework.** Find out from the local office when and where your Members of Congress will be speaking.
- 2. Prepare questions ahead of time.**
- 3. Familiarize yourself with your Members of Congress.** You can find information about them on the WAND web site: [www.wandtakeaction.org](http://www.wandtakeaction.org).
- 4. Designate a note taker** to jot down information and promises made by the Member of Congress.
- 5. Seek out media after the meeting** to talk about your issues if they were not covered.
- 6. Seek out the Member of Congress (or staff) after the meeting** to introduce yourself and follow up on your question (or ask it if you were not able to during the meeting).
- 7. Leave the event with a clear plan to follow up** with staff.
- 8. Stay on message.** Don't get distracted or angry if you feel your question is not adequately addressed. Be confident, considerate and persistent in repeating the question and asking for a response.



Lane Stone, WAND Education Fund



Marie Rietmann, WAND public policy director

“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it’s the only thing that ever has.”

—Margaret Mead

### COMMONLY USED CONGRESSIONAL STAFF TITLES

Since each Member of Congress relies on their staff, it’s helpful to know the titles and principal functions of each one.

**Administrative Assistant or Chief of Staff** reports directly to the Member of Congress; usually has overall responsibility for evaluating the political outcome of various legislative proposals and constituent requests.

**Legislative Director** makes recommendations to the Member of Congress regarding the pros and cons of all legislative issues.

**Legislative Assistant** advises a Member of Congress on a particular set of legislative issues.

**Press Secretary or Communications Director** has the responsibility to build and maintain open and effective lines of communication between the Member of Congress, his or her constituency, and the general public.

**Scheduler or Executive Assisant** is responsible for allocating the time of the Member of Congress among the many demands that arise from Congressional responsibilities, staff requirements, and constituent requests.

Other staff titles in a Congressional office may include: **Legislative Correspondent**, **Office Manager**, and **Staff Assistant**.

## Tips for grassroots activists

### HOW TO INFLUENCE PUBLIC POLICY

#### Thoughts of a grassroots activist / DC lobbyist / Hill staffer

By Marie Rietmann, WAND Public Policy Director

(listed in order of effectiveness)

#### 1. Help get the right people elected.

No amount of constituent input will change the mind of any elected official who is adamantly opposed to your position.

(This involves many activities — the most important of which is to register and to vote. And to make sure your friends do, too.)

#### 2. Develop an identity with your Senators and Representative.

Volunteer for their campaigns, host coffees for them, and get involved with their legislative agenda. Your help in delivering a constituency matters more than money.

The constituency you deliver can provide votes for that Member of Congress or support for an issue that he or she cares about. For example, you can help gain the support of others in your state’s delegation for a pet project of the Member of Congress, or you can convince your advocacy group to push for it.

#### 3. Develop a relationship with the staff who handle your issue (in both state and DC offices).

Be able to offer them information or other assistance they need. You’ll be more effective if you don’t just take their time.

A grassroots activist with unique expertise can be extremely valuable to staff. Staff could not do their jobs without lobbyists (and that means *you!*).

#### 4. Assemble citizen groups to meet with your Senators or Representative regarding your issue.

These are equally effective in the state or the DC office. If the meeting is in the local office, follow up with the Legislative Assistant in Washington, DC who is responsible for your issue to make sure they hear your message as well.

#### 5. Raise your issue at the town hall meetings of your Senators and Representative.

This will make it seem like there is a groundswell for your point of view.

#### 6. Join together with others who support your cause, or convince existing groups of its importance.

#### 7. Write letters (or send emails!) to your Senators and Representative.

Those written in your own words are the most effective and noticed.

#### 8. Call your Members of Congress to express your opinion (either DC or state offices). Provide your name and address.

*Note:* You can’t possibly imagine just how many messages — letters, phone calls, emails, and faxes — arrive in Capitol Hill offices every day. That means it’s more important than ever that you develop a relationship with your Members of Congress and their staff.

